This Time We Knew
Mestrovic, Stjepan, Cushman, Thomas

Published by NYU Press

Mestrovic, Stjepan and Thomas Cushman.
This Time We Knew: Western Responses to Genocide in Bosnia.
NYU Press, 1996.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/15811.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15811

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=503817
In April 1994 genocide erupted in Rwanda. By the time the carnage had run its course in this country of eight million, roughly five hundred thousand people fell victim to a premeditated genocidal campaign that was designed by Hutu extremists to cleanse the country of the minority Tutsis. The Security Council’s initial response to the violence was not to expand the size and responsibilities of the UN operation but to call for its reduction. Only a month later did the Security Council deliver its proposed response to the genocide, and it was not until a UN-authorized French operation arrived in late June that the United Nations offered some sort of protection for civilians in Rwanda. The United Nations eventually returned in the fall, but this was long after the genocide had run its course and a modicum of stability had returned.

The overwhelming response by the international community to the genocide was one of silence and a decided lack of urgency. To be sure, there were those who implored the United Nations to match the international response to the moral imperative, but by all accounts there was comparatively little of that. Still, many commentators have noted in disbelief that the United Nations, the symbol and representative of the international community, could remain idle while such horrors were occurring before its very eyes. The United Nations defends itself against
such criticism because it is, to quote its secretary-general, merely a servant of the member states and is obligated to carry out the mandates of the Security Council and no more. The subtext, then, is that the United Nations’ failure to respond forcefully to genocide was the preference of its member states. The United Nations’ indifference is an indicator of the member states’ indifference; nothing more, nothing less. Conversely, the United Nations could have been an effective agent against genocide had only the member states desired as much. So the failure resides with states. At the end of the day, states calculated that their own citizens cared very little about genocide, or at least they did not care enough to place their men and money on the line.

While there is much to this argument, this is only part of the story. As state and UN officials framed and discussed how to respond to genocide, they rarely approached the topic in such a callous manner; rather, their responses were shaped by and filtered through the organizational culture and bureaucratic interests of the United Nations. I come to this conclusion from personal observations and experiences. Beginning in September 1993 I was a political officer at the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. This opportunity arose through a fellowship from the Council on Foreign Relations, which offers to place academics like myself somewhere in the foreign policy bureaucracy so that we can, in theory, carry out a research project but, in practice, become part of the policy process. When I first arrived at the U.S. mission I worked on Somalia, but soon thereafter the United States announced its withdrawal, and my responsibilities were shifted from Somalia to other peacekeeping operations. By January 1994 I was the political officer for various parts of sub-Saharan Africa, including Rwanda. Among my duties as a political officer (sometimes referred to as an “action officer”) were reading cable traffic on my issue, writing talking points for the ambassadors, covering my issue in the Security Council and writing cables on its proceedings, and generally acting as a conduit between Washington and the United Nations.

Consequently, I was well-positioned as both an observer and a participant when genocide erupted in Rwanda in April 1994. Although horrified by the Security Council’s failure to take even the most minimal steps to alleviate the suffering, I justified the lack of action with the assumption that anything short of a massive and dramatic intervention would have stopped the genocide, the knowledge that no states were offering troops for such a campaign, and the belief that another “loss” after Somalia would jeopardize the United Nations’ future. When I left the U.S. mission
in June 1994 and returned to academic life I began to put these thoughts to paper, and wrote on peacekeeping and its future, highlighting the policy implications of Rwanda and other peacekeeping operations. An important conclusion was the need to protect the United Nations' resources and to better define the limit and scope of potential UN operations in order to salvage its reputation and to place on a firmer footing the basis of member states' support. When asked to discuss the United Nations' failure to respond to the genocide in Rwanda, I would argue that there was no effective basis for intervention, that throwing peacekeepers into dangerous situations to demonstrate the international community's concern needlessly exposes them to violence and undermines the United Nations' future, and that the Security Council's decision reflected a welcome learning process concerning when the conditions are ripe for peacekeeping to be effective.¹

Although I still have strong doubts whether there was an effective basis for UN intervention in Rwanda, as I reflect on the Security Council's debates and my stance I am increasingly struck by how the concerns for the organization overshadowed, drove, and framed the debate, how easily member states and UN officials were able to conclude that the needs of the organization overrode the needs of the victims of genocide. The concern for the organization overshadowed and dominated much of the debate in the Security Council over whether or not to intervene, and I, too, framed the issue in these terms. There is little evidence, for instance, that the Secretariat or any member state vigorously petitioned the international community to assemble an intervention force, and most were much more exercised by the need to restrain the United Nations from any further involvement. Indeed, I now pose the issue in a more brutal manner: that the United Nations had more to lose by taking action and being associated with another failure than it did by not taking action and allowing the genocide in Rwanda. The choice was straightforward: genocide was acceptable if the alternative was to harm the United Nations' future.

I am increasingly drawn to the conclusion that the bureaucratization of peacekeeping contributed to this indifference to the suffering of the very people it was mandated to assist. As I, for one, more closely identified with the United States and the United Nations, it became easier for me to remain indifferent to the occasional evil because of the overarching needs of the organization. My intuition is that this narrative is as applicable to Bosnia as it is to Rwanda. Why did I justify UN inaction in Rwanda
because of concern for the United Nations’ reputation and future? How were I and others able to strike a comfortable moral equation between the reputation of the United Nations and the victims of the genocide in Rwanda? Why were the United Nations and NATO motivated to act in Bosnia only to save their reputation rather than to protect the victims of ethnic cleansing and the residents of safe havens? In this article I want to explore the possible connection between the discourse of acting in the best interests of the United Nations and the international community, the bureaucratization of peacekeeping, and the production of indifference in Rwanda and Bosnia.2

Peacekeeping and the Production of Indifference

To understand what makes this moral equation possible, I borrow the concept of the “production of indifference” from Michael Herzfeld’s Social Production of Indifference: Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy.3 Herzfeld opens with a succinct concern: “how and why can political entities that celebrate the rights of individuals and small groups so often seem cruelly selective in applying those rights?” How is it, he asks, that “Western” bureaucracies, which are supposedly rooted in a democratic culture, be so unaccountable to, and demonstrate such little concern for, those they represent? Why do citizens of a democratic society come to accept, if not expect, such arrangements? While I cannot do justice here to the complexity and breadth of Herzfeld’s provocative argument, he offers the following observations that inform my discussion of the relationship between peacekeeping and indifference.

First, bureaucracies are not only instruments of domination, they also are symbolic markers of boundaries between peoples and are expressive of the cultures that produced them. As symbolic instruments of the nation-state, bureaucracies differentiate citizens from noncitizens, separating the community of believers from the community of apostates. All bureaucracies, in short, are expressive of a community and exhibit criteria that define who is a member of the community and who is not. Second, bureaucracies will selectively apply rights even among the community of believers. Not all members of the community are treated equally or receive the same privileges; some are, if you will, more equal than others. Although part of the reason derives from material considerations, identity also figures centrally in determining who is a “core” member of the community, and, therefore, who is more likely to receive its benefits and
protection. Simply stated, while those with political or economic power are routinely given greater care and consideration by the state, those who are identified as possessing the defining qualities and characteristics of the community, including race, religion, and gender, will also receive better treatment than those who do not.

Third, identity is linked to the production of difference and indifference. Bureaucracies are connected to the identity of the community, differentiate between members of the community and nonmembers, and are expected to attend to members while ignoring nonmembers. "Compactly expressed . . . indifference is a rejection of those who are different." The identity of the bureaucracy, in other words, represents the emotional and cognitive mechanism for creating threats and producing apathy. Bureaucrats, as members of the nation-state, use identity to determine who will receive their attention and who will not. The most intuitive and straightforward marker, of course, is citizenship, and it is expected that bureaucrats will attend to citizens and be indifferent to noncitizens.

Yet bureaucrats also are known to disregard some who are citizens of the nation-state. This leads to the fourth observation: the same process that produces indifference to outsiders can also generate indifference to some members of the community. Why? One reason is that bureaucrats are more likely to attend to members of the community who exhibit its defining characteristics and qualities. Again, while some groups in society are seen as core members, others are defined as peripheral; those who are core are more likely to receive the bureaucrat's attention than are those who are peripheral. Another reason bureaucrats have selective attention is that they identify not only with their fellow citizens but also with their bureaucracy. Bureaucrats, in this respect, have something of a dual identity: as members of a particular community they draw symbolic boundaries between themselves and those outside the national state, and as members of a bureaucracy they draw boundaries between the organization and the community. Simply stated, bureaucrats will often privilege the needs of, and take their identity from, the bureaucracy rather than the community. Bureaucrats pursue not only a bureaucratic agenda but also a personal one. Successful bureaucrats are able to manipulate their culture to achieve their specific and personal goals.

Herzfeld offers a fourth reason bureaucrats will exhibit indifference toward members of the community. As Western bureaucracies developed and deepened, supposedly in response to the growing needs and demands of their constituents, they were able to remain indifferent to the plights of
The Politics of Indifference • 133

the individual because of the guise of universalism. The bureaucrat, as a representative of the state, is supposed to represent the collectivity; therefore, s/he can dismiss the needs of the individual on the grounds of the universal. To explain this development Herzfeld forwards the concept of "secular theodicy," which originates from Weber’s discussion of how religious systems account for the “persistence of evil in a divinely ordered world.” The basic idea is that because moral principles transcend time and space, they allow the individual to maintain a belief in the transcendental notwithstanding the existence of the occasional evil. By transferring the concept from the religious world to the secular world of nation-states, Herzfeld is suggesting that state officials can themselves explain the presence of evil (and even justify their own indifference) with reference to abstract moral principles. More to the point, both religious and secular theodicy are founded on a “principle of identity; the elect as an exclusive community, whose members’ individual sins cannot undermine the ultimate perfection of the ideal in which they all share. Both posit a direct connection between the community of believers and the unity of the ideal.” Therefore, the notion that actions occur with reference to and are embedded within the larger community allows bureaucrats and other members of the community to accept disappointments if not evil. Such indifference “permits genocide and intracommunal killings, to be sure, but it also perpetuates the pettier and less sensational versions of the same logic.”

To be sure, bureaucrats will seldom present their indifference and self-interest in a public manner. One way that bureaucrats excuse their indifference and failure to respond is through buck-passing, red tape and bureaucratic rules, and so on. Yet bureaucrats will also feign concern and use the rhetorical device of the common good and the community’s needs to cover their unwillingness to act and to further their own self-interest. In other words, they will frequently argue that their inability to act is not due to the limits of their bureaucratic responsibility and organizational rules but rather because these rules and practices are designed to protect the community’s interests and aspirations. Sometimes this is simply a rhetorical device designed to allow state officials to excuse their personal indifference and to pursue their own self-interest. Yet, at another level, it allows them to live with themselves while acting indifferent and permitting injustices; they begin to effect the understanding that they are representatives of organizations that are, in turn, representative of the common good, allowing them to become indifferent to the individual under the
discursive cloak of community. Such indifference is a testimony to the dominance of the needs of the organization over those of the individual, a testimony to the primacy of the universal over the particular.

Peacekeeping and Indifference

Herzfeld's discussion guides my narrative of the United Nations' actions regarding Rwanda and Bosnia by drawing attention to how: (1) the United Nations is a symbolic marker of the boundaries of the community; (2) the United Nations will selectively apply the rights of the community among its members; (3) identity helps produce difference and indifference by differentiating members of the community from nonmembers; and (4) UN and state officials will frequently identify with and protect the United Nations' interests and reputation and will evoke the discourse of universalism while ignoring the plights of the individual. These developments, I want to suggest, coincide with and are largely a function of the bureaucratization of peacekeeping that has occurred since the end of the Cold War.

To begin, a complex and contested feature of the United Nations is its constituency and articulated definition of the community: does the United Nations represent the "peoples" or states of the world? In the opening sentence of the Charter and throughout its fifty-year history, the United Nations has claimed that it represents the peoples of the world, and claims that there exist universal rights and principles that envelop state boundaries. In other words, the United Nations embodies a set of moral principles that are transcendental, existing across time and space, and the existence of state sovereignty can do little to abrogate or silence such principles. Indeed, various groups, including women, minorities, and native peoples, have used the United Nations to place their grievances on the world's agenda and to hold states accountable for how they treat their populations; their ability to do so is dependent on the discursive power of these claims and the vision articulated in the Charter.

Yet the UN Charter also observes that a cornerstone of international society and the United Nations is sovereignty and the principle of noninterference. The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization, its membership is limited to states, only states have the right to be part of the General Assembly and the Security Council, and states alone can determine what sorts of policies and actions the United Nations can espouse. Throughout its history the United Nations has generally promoted and
honored the principle of sovereignty, which means that any tension over
the its constituency has been resolved in favor of states.

This development is evident in the UN peacekeeping operations during
the Cold War. Peacekeeping forces and military observer missions were
designed with an eye to the politics of territorial restraint and juridical
sovereignty. Although peacekeeping is seen as an invention of the Cold
War and superpower conflict, it was originally designed to insure that
decolonization, which potentially unleashed questions and conflicts over
the state's territorial boundaries, and juridical sovereignty moved in tan-
dem. Conversely, these UN operations did not concern issues of human
security, the protection of human rights, or the goal of humanitarian
intervention, reflecting the general insistence of the newly emerging states
that state sovereignty be duly respected. Throughout the Cold War the
United Nations favored states over peoples; accordingly, the focus was on
the security of states rather than the security of peoples.

The end of the Cold War, however, shifted the United Nations' concern
from state security to "human security." One of the interesting features of
the United Nations' leap into the fray was a shift of representation: it was
to protect not only the community of states but also the community of
peoples. If prior to 1988 peacekeeping concerned interpositioning lightly
armed UN troops between two states that had agreed to a cease-fire, they
were now involved in a myriad of activities associated with nation build-
ing and humanitarian assistance. The UN involvement in Namibia, Camb-
obdia, and El Salvador involved domestic and ethnic conflict resolution
and facilitating the difficult transition from civil war to civil society.
"Operation Provide Comfort," the UN assistance to the Kurds of Iraq,
inaugurated a new chapter in humanitarian intervention, and Somalia
and Bosnia stirred further promise of the United Nations' humanitarian
instincts. Many UN officials with whom I spoke recall a sense of excite-
ment and exhilaration during these first post-Cold War days; not only
were they unshackled from the Cold War but their activism was directed
at helping people rather than states. "There are greater rewards," recalled
one official, "from helping the victims of political turmoil than its instiga-
tors." To be sure, there were some who feared that the United Nations had
gone too far and was now treading on state sovereignty, but others
championed this more ambitious agenda and cosmopolitan outlook, which
suggested a United Nations that was on the verge of fulfilling its initial
but long delayed promise. In any event, the United Nations, as exhibited
through its peacekeeping operations, was shifting away from state security and toward “comprehensive” security.

As the United Nations became increasingly concerned with the security of peoples, it still dealt and thought in state-centric terms: human security meant “saving failed states.” In doing so, the United Nations was signaling that while it was shifting its constituency, it was also provocatively suggesting who is considered a core member of the community. To save a failed state was to save a member of the international community. What does it take to be a member of the community? A necessary condition is that the state be granted juridical sovereignty by the community of states. Yet not all sovereign states are created equal. Although material considerations contribute to the currency of power, also present in shaping the defining qualities of core membership are ideational forces. Said otherwise, some types of states are worthy of emulation and come to define the highest aspirations of the community. As states and nonstate actors began to debate who was considered a “civilized” and responsible member of the international community, and as the United Nations began to actively consider what kind of states it wanted to create, considerable emphasis was placed on domestic order in general and democracy in particular. In other words, while the community of states was still interested in the state’s external behavior, an increasingly important element was the state’s domestic behavior and identity. The international community, in short, was interested in fashioning and encouraging the development of democratic states. One reason for this desire and concern for the state’s internal attributes was the growing belief that domestic threats to the state and domestic instability undermine international order; domestic stability, which is best secured through democratic principles, fosters international order. Still, all roads pointed to democracy. To belong to the elect, a state must be democratic.

Peacekeeping operations are a direct extension of the view that domestic stability in general and democracy in particular are related to international order and define membership in the international community. Nearly all post-Cold War operations concern the transition from civil war to civil society; for instance, the operations in Namibia (UNTAG), Cambodia (UNTAC), El Salvador (ONUSAL), and Haiti (UNMIH) all aspired to end civil war and forward democracy. Indeed, as the United Nations looked to end an operation it used the symbol of a “free and fair” election. Peacekeeping operations, in short, are designed with the purpose
of helping to rehabilitate fallen members of the community by instilling them with democratic features and characteristics.

This highly ambitious security agenda overwhelmed a bureaucratically and organizationally underequipped United Nations. In response to its observed shortcomings and associated failures, there emerged a flurry of peacekeeping proposals and reforms that were designed to professionalize, institutionalize, and make more efficient and effective UN peacekeeping. Contact groups were established, conferences held, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations was reorganized and expanded, a Situation Room, Department of Humanitarian Affairs, and Electoral Assistance Unit were inaugurated, standby arrangements for military forces were planned, and so on. These reforms and developments were absolutely essential if an antiquated and inefficient organization was to meet the challenges of the day and carry out its mandated responsibilities.

The bureaucratization also encouraged individuals and states to develop a vested interest in peacekeeping and the United Nations. For some the incentive was interest-based; they benefited materially and financially from their involvement in UN peacekeeping operations, and, therefore, championed their continuation. For others the benefits were not simply material but also cognitive; they came to believe that peacekeeping represented an important instrument of the international community for interstate and intrastate conflict resolution. Still others, however, came to identify with the idea of the United Nations and to see it as a symbol that transcended power politics. The common denominator of all three, however, is an identification with the United Nations, its interests, and its future. Inside and outside the United Nations, public officials and private citizens alike came to support and benefit from UN activities; the result was that a cadre developed who identified with the needs and interests of the organization.

An additional feature of the bureaucratization of peacekeeping was a greater consideration and elaboration of the conditions when an operation was likely to be successful, and, relatedly, should be approved. In the first days after the Cold War it seemed that no operation was too small, large, or complex to deserve UN attention; the United Nations was anxious to prove its promise, and the great powers, who now discovered the United Nations to be a useful place to dump intractable conflicts, encouraged that direction. These and other factors contributed to an explosion of peacekeeping operations. While there were eleven operations prior to
1988, subsequently there were twenty-four. Indeed, the Security Council appeared so quick to authorize a proposed operation that many quipped that "the UN never met an operation it didn't like." By the fall of 1993, however, many state and UN officials grumbled that such automatic authorizations were leaving the United Nations stretched thin and increasingly ineffective; it was time, they said, to exhibit greater self-restraint. The sobriety was partially a response to "failures" in Somalia and Bosnia, and the Security Council now began to incorporate a list of considerations to inform its decision to approve or extend a peacekeeping operation, including whether there is a genuine threat to peace and security; regional or subregional organizations can assist in resolving the situation; a cease-fire exists and the parties have committed themselves to a peace process; a clear political goal exists and is present in the mandate; a precise mandate can be formulated; and the safety of UN personnel can be reasonably assured. In many respects, the United Nations was returning to its traditional tenets that peacekeeping was dependent on the consent of the parties and strict neutrality, a growing belief that its functions were to compel and encourage—not coerce and force—stability. In any event, there was growing sentiment that the future of peacekeeping depended on the Security Council elaborating a tighter set of conditions for the authorization or extension of an operation.

The emergence of these criteria, however, contributed to the production of indifference. The bureaucratization of peacekeeping, both in terms of its means and the conditions for its deployment, was couched in terms of the organization's needs. To be sure, there was an emerging pragmatism that demanded that the United Nations' activities match the willingness and resources of its member states, but in the wake of Bosnia and Somalia there was considerable fear that any more UN "failures" would spell the end of the United Nations. Much discussion at the United Nations revolved around how to better publicize "success stories," how to portray so-called failures as successes (or at least to demonstrate that the United Nations was not to blame), and how to ensure that the United Nations was not saddled with operations that had little chance of success. And many of the same individuals who now supported and had a stake in peacekeeping also were clamoring for greater sensitivity to the question of when peacekeeping was effective, and exhorting the Security Council to reject those proposed operations that did not satisfy these conditions. In short, there occurred an important shift in the discourse of peacekeeping as officials in and around the United Nations were now taking greater
care to protect the organization’s interests, reputation, and future. Select wisely became the adage, because the next selection may be your last.

The concern for the United Nations’ reputation and interests affected the operations that were selected. Perhaps the first instance in which the needs of the organization were explicitly cited and used to justify inaction was the Security Council’s decision not to intervene in Burundi in October 1993, when nearly one hundred thousand died in ethnic violence. Living in the immediate shadows of Somalia, many members of the Security Council argued against intervention on the grounds that there was “no peace to keep” and that the United Nations needed to avoid obvious quagmires. Many UN officials and delegates breathed a sigh of relief when the Security Council opted to abstain from the conflict, observing that the United Nations had to conserve its energies for “winners.” Burundi symbolized a shifting sentiment at the United Nations concerning the feasibility and desirability of humanitarian intervention. After all, such crises are a by-product of wars, wars are defined by instability, and a modicum of stability is a precondition for effective peacekeeping. The United Nations, in effect, was stepping away from its previous move toward human security and back toward state security. There was, if you will, a belief that the occasional evil could be tolerated so long as it did not damage the greater collective good.

By the fall of 1993, then, there were three related and highly important shifts in the discourse and practices of peacekeeping. First, there was greater concern for the United Nations’ organizational needs, reputation, and future. As peacekeeping received greater attention and resources, various groups and individuals came to have a vested interest in its activities and future. The desire by UN officials and member states to pick winners and avoid failures meant that the United Nations was less interested in human security than its own well-being. Second, the desire to identify the conditions under which peacekeeping was effective meant that it was less likely to be deployed during instances of humanitarian crises or severe domestic turmoil. The United Nations could be effective only when there was a “peace to keep,” and was best utilized for nurturing democracy. Effectiveness, in other words, was now being defined as creating the conditions for domestic order and democracy.

Third, whereas once UN officials routinely noted that they had a responsibility to help those who could not help themselves, they were now suggesting that the United Nations could help only those who were willing to help themselves. The language that began to creep into nearly
all Security Council statements as a consequence of Somalia indicated that the Security Council would maintain an operation only so long as the parties of the conflict demonstrated a resolve to work toward political progress; in doing so, the Security Council emphasized, for instance, how “the people of Somalia bear the ultimate responsibility for achieving national reconciliation and for rebuilding their country.” Such statements are highly defensible; the United Nations, stretched thin and facing a nearly inexhaustible number of potential crises, must decide who deserves its attention, and one reasonable criterion is the active support of those it is helping. Yet the shift in language represented a search not only for accuracy but also for political expediency, to shift the criticism away from the United Nations and onto Somalia. Many UN officials and member states were now routinely claiming that “the people had to take control of their lives” as a way of deflecting criticism away from the organization. Indeed, whereas once they recognized that “the people” were the victims of violence and needed the protection of the international community, these same officials were now, for all intents and purposes, using the failure of “the people to take control of their lives” as a justification for inaction. Who were “the people” in Bosnia? in Somalia? in Rwanda? By and large “the people” no longer meant the victims of violence but those who controlled the means of violence. The United Nations had decidedly stepped away from its initial post-Cold War concern for human security and returned to the traditional tenets of peacekeeping that stressed the need for stability as a precondition of deployment.

The bureaucratization of peacekeeping was producing indifference. This had a number of components. To begin, the great powers used the United Nations to give the appearance of being involved, concerned, and engaged at minimal cost. This had already become cruelly evident in Bosnia. By hiding behind the UN flag, in other words, member states were able to mask their own indifference. Moreover, UN officials and member states became much more concerned with preserving the reputation and furthering the interests of the organization, and this meant ensuring that the United Nations became involved only when the probability of success was reasonably assured. Conversely, those moments when the United Nations was most needed, for instance, during a humanitarian crisis, it was less likely to get involved because of the fear that such involvement might jeopardize its interests and reputation. Yet moving toward indifference is not to be taken lightly or adopted without well-developed defense mechanisms; to justify the failure to act, UN and state
officials developed a battery of defenses and devices, among which were the needs of the organization and the unfortunate necessity of ignoring the occasional evil in order to justify the continuance of the organization (which is equated with the community's interests).

Rwanda

These developments imprinted the UN response to genocide in Rwanda. The genesis of this tragic chapter of Rwanda's history can be briefly told. Beginning in the late 1980s mainly Tutsi refugees who had fled Rwanda to neighboring Uganda established an independence movement, the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF). From Uganda they launched a civil war in 1990 against the Hutu-led Rwandan government; because of the RPF's battlefield successes, a French-led force intervened to support its longtime Hutu allies. This represented only a temporary lull in the civil war, for the violence continued until the summer of 1993 when the RPF and the Rwandan government concluded the Arusha agreement that offered the promise for an end to the civil war and national reconciliation. On October 5, 1993, the Security Council, though with some concerns regarding whether the peace was possible, authorized a peacekeeping operation to oversee the Arusha agreement.

If the Security Council was concerned, it was for good reason. Early reports warned that Arusha would be difficult to implement because of the objections of extremist Hutu elements. Obstacles to implementation began almost as soon as the ink was dry on the agreement, and the initial December deadline came and went without the establishment of the transitional government. There was still no government when UNAMIR came up for renewal in early April, and many on the Security Council, increasingly aggravated by the heel dragging of the Hutu-led Rwandan government, were intent on using the renewal debate to send a message to the government that the United Nations might withdraw unless progress was made in the near future. How strong these signals should be and how serious should be the threat to close the operation were principal points of contention during these negotiations over the mandate's extension. The United States was quite insistent that the Rwandan government be told that unless it quickly established the transitional government the UN operation would be closed. Its stated justification for doing so was, first, to use whatever carrots and sticks were available to move the political progress forward, and, second, to signal to present and future operations
that the existence of a peacekeeping operation was tied to political progress. Although the Clinton administration might have had the future of the United Nations in mind as it formulated its policies, it also incorporated its own political future in that decision: it was intent on demonstrating that it could be tough on peacekeeping to a Congress that was fairly hostile to the United Nations. Such “toughness,” suggested some administration officials, would benefit the United Nations because the administration would better shield it from further congressional attacks. “Tough love,” offered one U.S. official. In any event, the Security Council approved an extension just as the mandate expired, satisfied that its concerns were communicated to the Rwandan government (which happened to be a member of the Security Council).

No sooner had the Security Council approved the mandate extension than on April 6 the plane carrying Rwandan president Habyarimana, who was returning from Tanzania where he was rumored to have put the final pieces in place for the transitional government, crashed as it approached the Kigali Airport. In a swift, preplanned, and highly coordinated operation, the extremist forces within the military executed moderate Hutu and Tutsi politicians. With only five thousand lightly armed peacekeepers scattered throughout Rwanda, UNAMIR was ill-prepared to confront the wave of terror unleashed by Hutu extremists against Tutsis and Hutu moderates. UN troops were instantly confronted by two increasingly untenable tasks: protecting the lives of innocent civilians and defending themselves. The tension between these two goals became immediately apparent when ten Belgian peacekeepers were brutally murdered as they tried to protect moderate Hutu politicians during the first days of the violence; the remaining Belgian troops were widely believed to be marked for assassination. If the non-Belgian peacekeepers were not at immediate risk from Hutu forces, they were running dangerously low on fuel, water, and food; moreover, resupplying or rescuing them was becoming increasingly questionable as the airport became a major battleground, raising the real possibility that any approaching aircraft might suffer the same fate as Habyarimana’s. To make matters worse, the RPF was now assembling and preparing to march on Kigali. Therefore, the meager and badly supplied UN forces were confronted by two wars: the Rwandan government’s terror campaign against its “enemies” and the brewing civil war between the RPF and the government.

Back in New York the Security Council had to decide quickly on the future of UNAMIR and the UN response to the growing violence. While
the Secretariat generally maintains some say over the future of peacekeeping operations by structuring the debate in the Security Council through its reports and recommendations, in this instance its ability was heightened because few if any member states had independent sources of information and had come to rely on the Secretariat and UNAMIR for intelligence on the conditions on the ground. Yet the Secretariat shied away from taking this leadership responsibility and opportunity to imprint the Security Council’s debate on the future of UNAMIR, leaving the impression that it was either overwhelmed to the point of paralysis or insensitive to the dead peacekeepers and the escalating violence. As I met with my contacts at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and attempted to ascertain what might be their thinking and recommendations, I became increasingly alarmed by their “business-as-usual” approach. Few I encountered displayed much urgency.

Two other incidents reinforced this impression of a distant Secretariat. In the first days of the crisis there was a meeting between the troop contributors to Rwanda and the UN Secretariat. Many troop contributors bitterly complained that they were unable to receive any information on the whereabouts or safety of their troops; they could not even get DPKO to return their phone calls. As those attending the meeting departed they mumbled that they could not afford to place the lives of their people in the hands of a cavalier United Nations. One story making the rounds was that a member of the Secretariat said that the United Nations need not be overly concerned with their troops since “they are not our boys.” In the United Nations’ world, according to the delegate who told me the story, jeeps are more valuable than people. Although I cannot say that the incident ever occurred, it sounded plausible to me, and, more important, very plausible to others.

Boutros-Ghali also emanated indecision to the point of paralysis if not complacency. He happened to be in Europe in early April, and elected to keep to his schedule and declined to return to New York. In the view of many Security Council members, this decision was irresponsible and nearly inexplicable, a troubling abdication of responsibility and leadership. A more disturbing episode concerned a reported conversation between the secretary-general and the former Belgian foreign minister William Claes. With ten peacekeepers already dead and its remaining soldiers at risk, the Belgian government was debating whether to withdraw its troops. Claes called Boutros-Ghali to ascertain the Secretariat’s thinking and how Belgium’s decision might affect the future of UNAMIR. Ac-
According to an authoritative source, despite the urgency of the situation, Boutros-Ghali responded by saying that he would “get back to him in four or five days.”

The Secretariat’s performance in the Security Council was equally removed and noncommittal, as it provided little input into or direction for the debate. Its reports during the first, highly critical days were always sketchy, insistent that it was not in a position to present definite options to the Security Council on the future of UNAMIR. At the time I attributed their lack of direction to “not being up to the task” of crisis management. Yet a highly authoritative and exhaustive report on Rwanda suggests not amateur but rather instrumental and strategic behavior. The Secretariat was receiving definite options and instructions from its Force Commander General Romeo Dallaire, who was cautiously optimistic that a limited military intervention could halt the bloodshed. The Secretariat, however, failed to pass on UNAMIR’s observations and recommendations to the Security Council. I can only speculate on why the Secretariat would fail to enter the force commander’s observations into the Security Council’s debate, but one very real possibility is that the Secretariat was fearful of becoming further embroiled and mired in an ethnic conflict that spelled little possibility of success and only danger and failure. By taking a highly noncommittal position, the Secretariat conveyed the image that it was either opposed to any further involvement or completely overwhelmed by events.

While the motives are unknown, the consequences of the Secretariat’s actions are more certain: the Secretariat’s failure to offer any concrete options, let alone the possibility of a successful intervention, played directly into the hands of those Security Council members who demanded UNAMIR’s immediate withdrawal. Many of the permanent members argued forcefully for withdrawal on the grounds that UNAMIR’s mandate to oversee the Arusha accords was over, no country was willing to send its troops into an increasingly chaotic environment, access to the airport was progressively precarious, the Security Council’s responsibility was to protect its peacekeepers, and keeping a symbolic force in Kigali would not only expose the peacekeepers to needless danger but also threaten the United Nations’ future. Many of the nonpermanent members of the Security Council, however, argued for increasing UNAMIR’s size and handing it more responsibility, including the protection of civilians. Those advocating this position, however, had little ammunition: the Secretariat, which would be responsible for carrying out the mandate, was silent,
and silence was widely interpreted as disapproval; in addition, no troop contributors were volunteering for an expanded force.

After nearly two weeks of endless and circular debate, on April 21 the Security Council decided to withdraw the bulk of UNAMIR and to leave in place those that might help General Dallaire fashion a cease-fire agreement between the RPF and the government. Because this outcome was consistent with the stated U.S. position, many argue that the United States bent the Security Council to its will. Yet persuasion and not coercion is what won the debate, and those who were arguing for withdrawal had the silence of the Secretariat and the discursive power of the United Nations' interests to give weight to their arguments. By the end of the debate there was a general consensus that peacekeepers, unprotected and exposed, could do little good and much harm to themselves and the United Nations' reputation and future; even those states who initially argued for expanding UNAMIR's size and mandate chose to vote in favor of rather than abstain from the resolution.18 Moreover, the decision to maintain a token presence was consistent with the Security Council's desire to preserve the United Nations' reputation. Expanding or completely withdrawing UNAMIR might easily tarnish the United Nations' reputation; the former because it might hand the United Nations another failure, the latter because it would make the United Nations appear morally bankrupt and wholly unavailable when it was most needed. By maintaining a presence, the United Nations was able to symbolize its continued concern. In general, those who argued for reducing UNAMIR's presence couched their claims in terms of the organization's needs, and frequently did so to mask their self-interest. At the end of the day, prudence on the side of the United Nations carried the debate.

After the Security Council voted to reduce UNAMIR's presence, the discussion somewhat ironically returned to the United Nations' possible response to the genocide. In fact, the secretary-general now began to take a visible lead in using his bully pulpit to formulate options and to urge the Security Council and the member states to respond vigorously to the continuing massacres. When the Secretariat finally unveiled its long-awaited plan in late April, it was greeted by the Security Council with considerable enthusiasm. Yet the enthusiasm was arguably less for its potential effectiveness as an antidote to genocide and more for its "impression management," that is, to try and recover the United Nations' moral standing.19 Simply put, while this proposal proved merely symbolic and highly impractical—it proposed to dispatch five thousand troops to
Kigali, acknowledged that the forces might not be located for months (if ever), and confessed that it had no real idea what they would do once they arrived—it did generate the impression that the United Nations was poised for action. Consequently, most members of the Security Council quickly embraced this unworkable scheme. The United States, however, rightly criticized the plan as little more than smoke, demanded that the United Nations and the Security Council design a realistic proposal, and circulated its own suggestions for providing relief to and protecting the growing number of refugees. The U.S. decision to oppose the Secretariat’s plan exposed it to much media criticism, but the basis of its opposition threatened to expose the Security Council’s Potemkin village.20

During these first weeks and the enfolding genocide the Security Council remained “seized of the matter,” in almost constant session for updates from the Secretariat and to outline options for future action. Sitting through these lengthy meetings could be tortuous: officials could have distributed information as easily without convening the Security Council, and there were no concrete proposals for action. Why, then, the endless stream of meetings? One reason was to give all members the opportunity to express their moral outrage. At the end of the day’s debate the president of the Security Council would announce to the press that the Security Council was alarmed by the violence and would continue to follow events closely. Indeed, there was a nearly rhythmic quality to the deliberations during these first weeks. On one day hours would be spent exchanging information and extolling the need for concrete action; pleased that now they had expressed sufficient concern, delegates would hold a highly abbreviated meeting the next day. This pattern repeated itself during the height of the crisis throughout April and into May.

Another reason was that having Rwanda on the Security Council’s agenda meant giving the international community the appearance that it cared, enabling it to veil its indifference. While member states were unwilling to assemble an intervention force, they also did not want to appear heartless and indifferent to genocide. By filling the halls of the United Nations, remaining in constant session, and generating endless documents and statements, the Security Council could give the facade of action when in fact few if any states wanted anything of the kind. The very presence of the United Nations enabled states to cloak their indifference (though perhaps not very effectively). This suggests that one function of the United Nations is to distribute accountability to the point that it becomes irretrievable. Who was to blame for the lack of response to Rwanda? Everyone. The mere
presence of the United Nations allows states (and the Secretariat) to shield themselves from responsibility, to point fingers in all directions, to mask their inaction in the name of a greater good.

Third, these meetings also provided the members of the Security Council with an opportunity to remind themselves that they had a responsibility not only to Rwandans but also to the United Nations. A defining subtext to the debate was the need to preserve the United Nations' future and to reject the intervention temptation. The dominance of the organization's needs became particularly stark as it became undeniable that genocide was transpiring. During the debate Security Council members were reluctant to utter the word "genocide," fearing its discursive ability to command action. Indeed, on those rare occasions when a member implored action because of genocide, the discussion slowly descended on the recognition that little could be done, that the Security Council had to protect UN interests, and that on no uncertain terms should the president of the Security Council use such irresponsible and highly inflammatory language when he met with the press. During these first few weeks the Security Council continually reminded itself that its course of action, regardless of its tragic consequences for those on the ground, was the only responsible and feasible option.

Maintaining a loyalty to the United Nations was facilitated by two other factors. First, those who were responsible for and oversaw Rwanda (and other operations) were "experts" in the way that I was an expert on Rwanda; expertise derived from my bureaucratic roles and responsibilities rather than my intrinsic knowledge. My expertise concerned the U.S. foreign policy process and UN operations, not Rwanda; my colleague had spent a career at the U.S. mission covering Africa but had never stepped foot on the continent. Our expertise, then, derived from our knowledge of the United States and the United Nations rather than those countries that were part of our "portfolio." Being able to elevate the United Nations' organizational needs over the events in Rwanda was also facilitated by scale, that is, the fact that discussions were occurring among UN officials and member states in New York while the tragedy was occurring in Rwanda. Herzfeld suggests that as the distance expands between the bureaucrat and those s/he is expected to serve it becomes more difficult for the bureaucrat to conceptualize them as residing within the same conceptual space.21 This facilitates a sense of indifference. While those in New York expressed genuine anguish for what was occurring in Rwanda, it was easier to identify with those with whom one interacted on a daily
basis. In contrast to the “civilized” confines of the diplomatic world, the reports from Rwanda suggested barbarism and cruelty unimaginable and of a different world. It was almost certain that I and others would more easily identify with our state’s interests and the organizational needs of the United Nations than the interests of those who lived in a country that was conceptually and strategically removed. That Rwanda was a member of the Security Council during this period did not help bridge the cultural gap; he was a Hutu, a member of the ruling coalition, and therefore linked to the architects of genocide. His presence did not help overcome the sense of indifference; rather, it acted as a reminder that the international community would have to tolerate the occasional evil, but that was a small price to pay to maintain the community’s central international organization.

Little was done in Rwanda until it was too late and relatively safe. The stark truth is that while many states called for action, few if any stepped forward to volunteer their own services for any intervention force. Yet the bureaucratization of peacekeeping, in my view, shifted the dynamics and debates in consequential ways. One counterfactual that I occasionally ask myself is, would the United Nations have responded more vigorously to Rwanda had it occurred, for instance, in April 1993 rather than in April 1994? If possibly yes, can the unwillingness to rush in be understood as simply a result of the fact that UN officials had learned when peacekeeping is most effective? If no, then we are left with the very real prospect that the bureaucratization of peacekeeping shaped the decision not to respond. Moreover, as the member states and the Secretariat debated what should be done, they could not in good conscience confess that their self-interest dictated that they ignore genocide. Rather, the United Nations loomed large in two respects as they formulated their nonresponse. Member states used the United Nations to mask their own indifference. To be sure, that indifference was not completely camouflaged, but it was shielded from direct view. And as they debated the potential consequences of action they forwarded the United Nations as a possible casualty. Any more peacekeeping fatalities, argued many in the halls of the Security Council, would undoubtedly mean more criticism and fewer resources for the United Nations. This was the moral equation and the justification for inaction.
Bosnia

If indifference accurately characterizes the international community’s and the United Nations’ response to the genocide in Rwanda, it is perhaps unfair and somewhat uncharitable to offer a direct parallel to Bosnia. The contrasting places of Bosnia and Rwanda in the Western imagination are brought into stark relief when it is recalled that in mid-April 1994, as the genocide in Rwanda was picking up full steam, Western media attention shifted dramatically from Rwanda to Bosnia due to a Serb assault on the safe haven of Gorazde. Arguably because of its contiguity to Europe, its echoes of the Holocaust, the potential implication of great power strategic interests, and the fit-and-start attention of the media and the Western public, Bosnia has intermittently commanded front-page news, many intellectuals, state officials, and private organizations lobbied long and hard for the West to respond appropriately to the ethnic cleansing and concentration camps. The United Nations has been present and active in the former Yugoslavia since the conflicts there first began, and there is now the International Force (IFOR) designed to stitch together political reconciliation. The indifference that defines Rwanda, therefore, does not wholly or accurately capture Bosnia. Yet systematic neglect instead of a forceful response to ethnic cleansing and war crimes better characterizes the Security Council’s and the United Nations’ response. Various features of the UN involvement in Bosnia are suggestive of the relationship between the bureaucratization of peacekeeping, the concern for the organization’s interests, and the production of indifference.

The United Nations began its peacekeeping presence in the former Yugoslavia with Security Council Resolution 743 of February 21, 1992, when the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was mandated to deploy to certain areas of Croatia where Serbs were a substantial minority, and to monitor the cease-fire between Serb and Croat forces. Before long, however, the consequences and conflicts associated with the disintegration of Yugoslavia spread to Bosnia, and when the United Nations became formally involved on July 13, 1992 (Security Council Resolution 764), its mandate differed from this initial operation in two respects. First, this second resolution was more narrowly humanitarian, designed “to ensure the security and functioning of Sarajevo airport and the delivery of humanitarian assistance.” Second, whereas Resolution 743 operated with the consent of the parties, the mention of Article 25 in
Resolution 764 suggested that the Security Council might require the host states to accept the operation and its humanitarian mission whether they liked it or not.\(^2^2\)

There is little evidence, however, that either the Security Council or the Secretariat was eager to jump into the fray of ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. Marrack Goulding, then UN undersecretary-general for political affairs, argued in an internal memo that the United Nations should keep its distance from Bosnia until it could operate with the consent of the parties and there was stability on the ground,\(^2^3\) a stance that not only reflected a traditional view of peacekeeping but would also suspend the United Nations’ moral involvement. And while Boutros-Ghali’s staff was working on *The Agenda for Peace* as the Security Council was debating Bosnia, his vision of a United Nations that was running complex and multidimensional peacekeeping operations did not immediately extend to combating ethnic cleansing and liberating concentration camps. The Secretariat’s general recommendations were to proceed slowly and cautiously.

The Security Council, however, disregarded this advice and chose to assign the United Nations the task of protecting the delivery of humanitarian assistance. The Security Council’s actions, however, were not motivated solely by humanitarian concerns. As is well known, because of a combination of symbolic boundaries and strategic calculations, neither Europe nor the United States saw itself as having just cause for intervention. Still, total disregard of the ethnic cleansing and the camps was both morally callous and politically unwise. By turning to the United Nations, the West could give the appearance of engagement and offer some limited assistance without having to become fully implicated in the conflict.\(^2^4\) Adam Roberts and Sir Brian Urquhart openly questioned whether this was not a cynical use of the United Nations; the former queried whether the West was using the United Nations “as a substitute for a real policy,” and the latter suggested that the West found the United Nations a good place to dump intractable and unwanted conflicts.\(^2^5\) The subtext to their observations and the Security Council’s deliberate decision to find a middle road between disengagement and involvement is that the West used the United Nations to mask its indifference. The history of the West’s role in Bosnia continued this initial pattern.

While UN and Western officials feared that by deploying peacekeepers they would be inviting “mission creep,” the overall record is that the United Nations and the Security Council studiously avoided any involve-
ment that would mean the use of force to either deliver humanitarian assistance or protect civilians. The UN mandates included enforcing no-fly zones, protecting the seven regions that became known as “safe havens,” delivering humanitarian assistance, making Sarajevo free from heavy weapons, and other demands in over one hundred Security Council resolutions over the last four years. The United Nations had the authority to enforce these resolutions and protect civilians: it could use “all necessary means.” Yet these mandates were intermittently implemented at best, and, at worst, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and other atrocities were carried out by Serbs in full view of the United Nations without much response.

How do we explain such indifference? There are arguably a multitude of explanations, including a lack of will on the part of the member states, Russia’s place on the Security Council and willingness to veto any robust action (because of its alliance with the Serbs), and the Security Council’s failure to allocate the resources and apply the diplomatic muscle required for the job. By and large many identify the primacy of state interests as the reason for the United Nations’ refusal to come to the defense of the civilians it was mandated to protect.

While these arguments have some merit, an organizational culture and bureaucratic interests also are present and contribute to indifference. Many journalists covering the war incredulously asked how intelligent, thoughtful, and internationally minded UN officials could articulate, through their actions and occasional statements, the view that ethnic cleansing had to be allowed to continue. How could they believe that they could remain morally uncompromised by their position? How were they able to maintain a distant stance, even while recognizing that their actions might implicate them in these atrocities?

One explanation is that UN officials insist that peacekeeping is most appropriate and most effective when it operates with the consent of the parties and the United Nations maintains neutrality and impartiality. These principles of peacekeeping generate the stance that enforcement actions are unproductive and are not what the United Nations is about. Although in the first moments after the Cold War the United Nations debated whether it should become involved in peace enforcement and collective security, the opinion of longtime hands was that the United Nations should be wary of this departure from its traditional organizational mission. Although Boutros-Ghali was an early advocate of a more muscular United Nations, he began to rethink this initial position and the wisdom
of the United Nations’ traditional approach after Somalia and other peacekeeping setbacks. Simply put, these peacekeeping travails reinforced the view that the United Nations should avoid enforcement action operate with the consent of the parties, and adhere to strict standards of neutrality. This broad organizational and bureaucratic culture defines what the United Nations is, what it is able to do, and how its interests are best served. Such organizational principles shaped the United Nations’ actions in Bosnia.

The United Nations’ operating principle of consent underlines its general reluctance to use force to deliver humanitarian assistance. An ongoing saga of the UN mission to provide humanitarian relief was the necessity of having to negotiate with and obtain the consent of the very forces that had caused this humanitarian crisis. UN officials had to constantly obtain permission from Serb authorities to use the Sarajevo airport and the roads to the safe havens, and quite often found their way blocked or were forced to endure numerous hardships and humiliations because of Serb intransigence. Although the United Nations was authorized to use force through the “all necessary means” provisions of the Security Council resolutions, on few occasions did UNPROFOR elect that option, preferring instead negotiation and consent. UN officials defended their decision to use persuasion rather than coercion on the argument that they could operate effectively only with the consent of the parties, and that force could be used but once (or that it might trigger a war it neither wanted nor was authorized to fight). The UN insistence on avoiding force derived not only from the negative lessons of Somalia and Bosnia but also from the positive lessons of Cambodia: the United Nations was most effective when employing its powers of persuasion and not its (rather limited) powers of coercion. The secretary-general’s special representative Yasushi Akashi, who had come to the former Yugoslavia from Cambodia, championed the principle of consent. After watching what occurred in Somalia after the United Nations chose to operate through force rather than persuasion, UNPROFOR Commander Michael Rose vowed not to cross the “Mogadishu line” and become “helpless.”

The UN peacekeeping ethos also claims for itself impartiality and neutrality, and these principles inform the United Nations’ unwillingness to militarily defend the safe havens. In this view, the United Nations’ power derives from persuasion rather than coercion, which, in turn, is dependent on its moral authority. And, the argument goes, its moral standing is founded on its impartiality. All parties must be treated equally
and not be shown favoritism or partiality. Therefore, in the moral calculus of the United Nations, to protect civilians might very well require taking sides, an act that would compromise the organization's neutrality and future effectiveness. For instance, some UN officials would concede that Bosnia had the clear moral imperative, but would also claim that as administrators of a peacekeeping operation they must remain impartial.\textsuperscript{34} UN officials, in other words, would have to tolerate the occasional evil if they were going to be able to remain effective not only in Bosnia but elsewhere.

Impartiality, therefore, flowed into indifference. Sometimes this meant rejecting the call to defend the safe havens. Responding to President Clinton's suggestion that the United Nations become more active in peace enforcement and battling the Bosnian Serbs, UNPROFOR Force Commander Michael Rose said, "If someone wants to fight a war here on moral or political grounds, fine, great, but count us [the United Nations] out. Hitting one tank is peacekeeping. Hitting infrastructure command and control, logistics, that is war, and I'm not going to fight a war with painted tanks."\textsuperscript{35} At other moments maintaining impartiality meant ignoring or distorting the casualties of war crimes.\textsuperscript{36} And at still other times it meant representing the interests of the aggressor rather than protecting the victim. For instance, in the spring of 1994 after the safe haven of Gorazde came under attack from Bosnian Serbs, NATO requested retaliatory air strikes. "But instead of ordering air strikes, [UNPROFOR Commander for Bosnia Michael Rose] asked the Bosnian government to make a 'goodwill gesture' to encourage the attackers to pull back . . . an act of capitulation requested neither by NATO nor by the UN Security Council."\textsuperscript{37} The predictable, violent, and sad conclusion of this culture of impartiality was the Serb conquest of the safe haven in Srebrenica in the summer of 1995, when Dutch peacekeepers stood by and watched war crimes being committed by Serbian troops.\textsuperscript{38} In general, UN officials could remain indifferent to crimes they were witnessing because of the principles of the consent of the parties and impartiality.

Yet the UN insistence on consent and impartiality might represent not only organizational culture but also self-interest. To become more fully involved in Bosnia, particularly when it could not be fully certain whether it had the diplomatic and military backing of the Security Council or NATO, might leave the United Nations on a limb and susceptible to greater criticism. By arguing that it had to adhere to the principles of consent of the parties and impartiality, the United Nations could avoid
further involvement and (hopefully) provide some cover from future criticism. No doubt these concerns intensified after the United Nations came under greater fire from its critics for its performances in Bosnia and Somalia in 1993. Moreover, when the United Nations was castigated for not protecting civilians, Boutros-Ghali and others would emphasize the importance of the humanitarian mission. In doing so, the United Nations could transform a moral failure into an organizational victory: if UNPROFOR was judged according to how well it protected civilians, then its activities were a failure; if, however, it was judged by its delivery of humanitarian relief, then it could be judged a qualified success. And, by emphasizing the delivery of humanitarian relief rather than the protection of civilians, UN officials could shift responsibility from themselves to the participants of the conflict. The United Nations could not be blamed for what the parties brought on themselves.

Yet there were moments when the United Nations and NATO punished the Serbs for their actions and for violating the Security Council resolutions. We must recognize, however, that the deployment of force was designed not to defend the safe havens but rather to protect peacekeepers and to rescue the reputation of NATO and the United Nations. To begin, there were frequent disagreements within NATO, within the Secretariat, and between NATO officials and the Secretariat over whether to retaliate against Serb attacks. Yet the impetus for the use of force was frequently the need to protect peacekeepers, not the residents of safe havens. For instance, the Serb assault on the safe haven of Gorazde in the spring of 1994 unleashed a storm of controversy over the United Nations' rejection of NATO's request for air strikes. In defending the UN decision, the undersecretary-general for peacekeeping operations, Kofi Annan, argued that the rationale for the air strikes is "to protect lives—not just of the handful of UN soldiers who might be threatened by a given attack but the thousands of lightly armed peacekeepers and hundreds of unarmed relief workers, military observers and police monitors whose lives could be threatened by precipitous military action." Missing from Annan's list of groups to be protected were the residents of the safe havens. Yet before one fully applauds NATO's stance, recall that "NATO governments . . . insisted that the air strikes [be] used to protect a handful of UN personnel, not the 65,000 residents of Gorazde." New York frequently chastised and overruled the military commanders in the field for ostensibly overstepping their authority and the mandate when they recommended the use of force. One famous incident was when Force Commander General Cot
publicly criticized the Secretariat for failing to approve his requested air strikes in January 1994. Yet he based his arguments on the need to revenge the "humiliation of the international community's force" and the need to make military threats credible. Simply put, NATO and the United Nations seemed more willing to use force to protect UN troops than it did to protect civilians; UN forces were most outraged when they were personally humiliated, not by acts of ethnic cleansing.

The United Nations and NATO also employed force to retrieve their reputation. In other words, the stimulus of this slide toward military confrontation was not moral indignation but rather impression management. Such moments generally occurred after the Bosnian Serbs launched a well-publicized attack against civilians, which would trigger a debate among the Security Council and the West over the proper response. The subtext to these debates, however, frequently turned on the reputations of NATO and the United Nations. For instance, in the spring of 1995 the Serbs assaulted the safe havens and Sarajevo and kidnapped peacekeepers. These developments left many openly asking not how to save Sarajevo but how to secure the United Nations' and NATO's future; commentators began clamoring that if NATO did not draw a line in the sand and stand firm, then NATO would unequivocally demonstrate its irrelevance to the post-Cold War order. After a lengthy debate, the United Nations authorized the deployment of a Rapid Reaction Force of ten thousand in June 1995. Yet the impression management intent of the force became painfully obvious as its mission was downgraded from opening the airport and delivering humanitarian relief to protecting peacekeepers, dramatizing that the growing involvement of NATO and the United Nations was designed to rescue their reputation and not to protect civilians. Similarly, President Clinton intimated that the real threat unleashed by the Serbian attack on Srebrenica was to the "integrity of the mission." In the Senate hearings on the possible U.S. deployment of soldiers to monitor any possible peace agreement, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and Secretary of Defense William Perry argued that the issue at stake was the future of NATO and the Western alliance. In general, Bosnia mattered not because of the moral tragedy but because the Western alliance was on the line. The United Nations' use of force was not to protect civilians in Sarajevo or the safe havens but rather the organization's interests. UNPROFOR acted to protect its reputation and peacekeepers and not the civilians who the peacekeepers were deployed to protect.

While it is difficult if not somewhat uncharitable to label as indiffer-
ence the United Nations’ multibillion-dollar, multiyear, and multidimensional operation in Bosnia, the general evidence suggests that the West used the United Nations as a place to mask its indifference and to avoid having to respond fully to the horrors of Bosnia. Yet UN officials had little trouble playing that part, and, indeed, sometimes excelled at it beyond what the Security Council and NATO officials expected or desired. Indeed, because both the Security Council and the Secretariat operated in a way that generally furthered the war aims of the Serbs, many of UNPROFOR’s harshest critics conclude that the UN role in Bosnia suggests not indifference but rather active complicity.46 In any event, as representatives of the international community’s central international organization, they represent the common good; as representatives of the common good they are able to remain indifferent to the individual because of the discursive cloak of community.

Conclusion

One of the central post-Cold War debates has been how to make the United Nations a more effective and useful instrument for international security. After a first wave of tremendous enthusiasm and promise, the high expectations for the United Nations were dashed as it became barraged by criticism and condemnation. These criticisms largely derived from the United Nations’ reported performance in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia, where it failed to fulfill its mandates and expectations. One response offered by many of the United Nations’ defenders is that the answer is not less of the United Nations but more. The United Nations requires more tools and capabilities for crisis management and prevention; the capability to intervene before the crisis explodes; and the ability to deploy its forces as soon as the Security Council authorizes the operation rather than after the lengthy delays it currently experiences. For instance, in the aftermath of Bosnia and Rwanda there is much talk that the United Nations should have an international “fire brigade,” early warning indicators, and other preventive measures that will enable it to act before it is too late.

There are many merits to these and other proposals, but the Security Council’s and the United Nation’s performance in confronting the genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda suggests that bureaucratization does not translate into action or intervention. First, an assumption of the search for
early warning indicators and the proposal for a UN standing army for preventive deployment suggest that knowledge brings action. There is an unwritten belief that with knowledge the international community will act. Yet it was not the lack of knowledge that halted action in either Bosnia or Rwanda—it was politics. In both cases state and UN officials knew of but chose to ignore the war crimes that were being committed. In both cases UN forces were on the ground and were eyewitnesses to acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide, and in both cases the rules of engagement prevented UN forces from coming to the active aid of civilians. More technologies and capabilities are no elixir and no substitute for a politics of engagement.

Second, while the professionalization of peacekeeping was absolutely necessary if peacekeeping was to have a future, this professionalization produced bureaucratization, and with bureaucratization individuals come to have a stake in and identify with the bureaucracy, begin to evaluate strategies and actions according to the needs of the bureaucracy, and, accordingly, begin to frame discussions and justify policies through a different mentality. As I became part of this bureaucratization process, I, too, altered how I judged and evaluated UN peacekeeping. Sometimes this meant I had a heightened awareness of the complexities of issues involved and the stakes of the game. Yet, at other times, this involved a shift in what I thought was desirable and valuable; I became more interested in protecting the bureaucratic and organizational interests than I was in employing the organization to help those it was supposed to serve.

This suggests that while the United Nations might be above power politics it is not above politics. The ideal is that the United Nations represents a nobler vision of global politics; indeed, the mere presence of the United Nations reminds states and individuals that they have an obligation not only to themselves but to each other, that they should avoid stark self-interested policies and pursue more enlightened strategies that reflect a cosmopolitan ethic. While there is truth to these observations, absent is a consideration of the United Nations as an organization that attends to its own interests, reputation, and future. UN officials were able to portray their self-interested policies as being in the best interests of the international community.

The United Nations is more than an arm of the international community; it is one of its most important symbols. It represents aspirations and values that are assumed to be common to states and transcend state
boundaries and historical periods. In this respect, it is the international community’s singular organization that embodies transcendental values and moral principles. The United Nations allows individuals and states to maintain a belief in the transcendental, even in the face of the occasional evil that exposes the sins of the members. That actions occur with reference to and are embedded within the larger community, in other words, allows bureaucrats and other members of the international community to accept disappointments if not evil. Officials in and out of the United Nations were able to explain the evils of Rwanda and Bosnia and their indifference by pointing to the secular religion of the international community and its cathedral, the United Nations.

NOTES

I want to thank Michael Herzfeld, Victoria Shampaine, and Hakan Yafuz for their comments.


2. I want to offer the following caveats. First, I am representing my personal reflections after a year’s time, and I am attempting, as best as possible, to represent and interpret the events unfolding around me; I have no doubt that others who also were there would tell a different tale. Relatedly, I observed these events from the U.S. mission to the United Nations, and I expect that those residing in Rwanda, the United Nations, or other delegations would offer a different view. Second, while I will argue that the bureaucratization of peacekeeping helps produce indifference, I came to respect the integrity and values of many of those with whom I worked; these were highly dedicated individuals who worked long hours and labored under difficult conditions, and who were pained and disturbed by these tragedies and the failure of the international community to respond commensurate with the moral imperatives.


4. Ibid., 33.

5. Ibid., 5–7.

6. Ibid., 10.


17. There is little doubt that after Somalia the United States wanted to avoid involvement in another humanitarian operation in Africa. The United Nations provided a highly useful device to this end, for it could appear engaged without having to become so. In a response to a question concerning the role of U.S. leadership, State Department spokesman Michael McLurry said that "this situation will be under the review at the United Nations, and that's appropriately the place where that discussion will occur." Elaine Sciolino, "Peacekeeping Under Stress," *New York Times*, April 15, 1994, A5.

18. Parenthetically, Boutros-Ghali did not distinguish himself at this moment either: when he finally recommended to the Security Council that UNAMIR forces be reduced, he hinted that his hand was forced by Belgium's inexplicable decision to withdraw its forces. The Security Council, uniformly outraged, rallied to Belgium's defense.


20. Part of the reason for the U.S. stance can be attributed to its desire to forward its proposal that would immediately dispatch troops to the borders of Rwanda to help with the emerging refugee crisis—but no more.
24. As George Kenney, one of the State Department officials who resigned over Bosnia policy, wrote, "The goal from the beginning was not good public policy, but good public relations." "See No Evil, Make No Policy," *Washington Monthly*, November 22, 1992, 33.
26. However, many of these resolutions were designed to cover up past policy failures and to overcome the demand for more concerted action. For instance, Senator Biden (D-DE) argued that the very need to create these safe havens resulted from the United Nations' acquiescence to ethnic cleansing and the desire to avoid any greater involvement. See Joseph Biden, Jr., "More UN Appeasement on Bosnia," *New York Times*, June 7, 1993, A15.
27. The contributions to this volume speak eloquently to the issue of identity. Other commentators have also wondered whether the UN response would have been different if the religious identity of the attacker and the victim were reversed, or, even more cynically, if the Bosnians had been dolphins. Edward Luttwak, "If Bosnians Were Dolphins . . ." *Commentary* 96 (October 1993): 27–32. The issue of identity and difference is also evident among UN officials. In *Slaughterhouse*, David Rieff offers various episodes in which UN officials created symbolic markers between themselves and the Bosnians.
28. See, for instance, Rieff, op. cit., 170, 193.
30. Another possibility is that UN officials believed that while the Serbs had instigated atrocities, the war had been won and the Bosnians had to recognize realities; consequently, their refusal to admit defeat delayed the possibility of a peace agreement, prolonged UNPROFOR, and made the United Nations' life more difficult. Rieff, op. cit., 127. In the reasoning of UN officials, UNPROFOR was there to protect the delivery of humanitarian assistance, fighting made it more difficult to accomplish this objective, and the Bosnian refusal to concede defeat was ultimately responsible for this end. Ibid., 139.
33. Rieff, op. cit., 170. Fred Cuny, one of the revolutionaries of humanitarian relief and a frequent organizer of humanitarian assistance to Sarajevo, who died while on a mission in Chechnya in 1995, liked to comment that “if the UN had been around in 1939 we would all be speaking German.” Quoted in Rieff, op. cit., 140.

34. Ibid., 166.


38. See the arresting article by David Rieff, “We Hate You,” New Yorker, September 4, 1995, 41–46.


40. Bruce Clark, “UN Exposed by Debacle in Gorazde,” Financial Times, April 18, 1994, 2.

41. Roger Cohen, “Dispute Grows over UN’S Troops in Bosnia,” New York Times, January 20, 1994, 8. Another infamous incident occurred when Bosnia Force Commander General Phillipe Morillon went to Srebrenica to compel the Serbs to stop their shelling; he was lambasted by the Secretariat for exceeding the mandate. Rieff, Slaughterhouse, 169.


46. See the cover story of the New Republic, “Accomplices to Genocide: The Consequences of Appeasement in Bosnia,” August 7, 1995. Rieff pulls no punches when he expresses his view that the United Nations was morally complicit in helping the Serbs carry out the genocide: “By providing a humanitarian
fig leaf for what was really taking place in Bosnia, and pretending that their interests were not the parochial ones of a moral and intellectually bankrupt organization that had been forced by the Security Council to take on a task it was quite incapable of coping with honorably, UNPROFOR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations became accomplices to genocide.” See Rieff, Slaughterhouse, 189.